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# INKLINGS and IDLINGS

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The Newsletter of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association

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313 East Third Street • Galesburg, Illinois 61401 • (309) 342-2361

*Spring, 2000*

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## Songbag Concerts Return

After a winter respite, the Songbag Concert Series, which is coordinated by John Heasley, has resumed at the Carl Sandburg Historic Site. The first, which was presented February 10th, featured Ellen and Mike Baum, familiar Galesburg musicians. Their original songs were well received by a near-capacity audience.

The date of the next concert is March 9th. The folk group "Doon the Brae," will present a broad range of Celtic music. In addition to contemporary melodies from Ireland and Scotland, they will offer arrangements of traditional fiddle tunes from the Scottish Highlands, as well as Robert Burns songs and border ballads. Musicians Maurie and Forrie will play a variety of instruments including the cittern, guitar, fiddle and penny-whistle.

Mark Dvorak was enthusiastically received when he appeared on October 21st. He will return on April 13th. In the spirit of Woody Guthrie, Dvorak's performances are a blend of the innocent and the determined, fashioned from the grassroots music of the past and present. His intimate style helps his audiences to feel the sadness, mystery, wonder and joy that comes to life when he sings and plays.

His performances are marked by a clear knowledge of folk music and of his art, and also by an

understanding of what a given audience would like to hear. He is fluent on the guitar, 5-string banjo and fretless banjo, and has hundreds of songs in his repertoire. His natural style of performing can make an old song seem new, and a new song sound familiar.

The identities of the artists for the May concert have not yet been finally decided.

All of the concerts will begin at 7 p.m. in the Visitors' Center of the Historic Site, in an intimate, smoke and alcohol free environment.

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## Even More Additions

We are happy to welcome the following new members of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association:

Mr. and Mrs. Andy (Lori) Doka  
John Heasley  
Dave Johnson  
Jane Johnson  
Mr. and Mrs. Jeffrey (Charlene) Johnson  
Mr. and Mrs. Steve (Laura) Johnson  
Patricia Krasner

If you have joined the Association recently, and your name is not listed above, please notify *Inklings and Idlings* of the omission so it may be rectified.

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**The Officers and Directors  
of the Carl Sandburg  
Historic Site Association**

President--Norm Winick  
Vice President--Margaret Krueger  
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**Newsletter Editor**

Barbara Schock

Site Superintendent--Carol Nelson  
Site Interpreter--Steve Holden

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**From the President**

As members, you know the benefits of belonging to the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association. They include invitations and free admission to all concerts and special events; this newsletter which contains information about the Association's activities and stories about Carl Sandburg and his times; and a 10% discount on all museum store purchases.

The foregoing are given for a single \$10 membership. It would be a thoughtful and relatively inexpensive gift. For \$20, you could give the same membership to an entire family.

If you feel even more generous, you might consider a \$50 membership, for which the recipient would be sent a compact disc of Sandburg's poetry.

Finally, a \$250 membership would include all of the above and a book by Sandburg.

If you decide to favor someone with a membership at any level, simply send a check in the appropriate amount, along with the name and address of the recipient, to:

Carl Sandburg Historic Site  
Association  
313 East Third Street  
Galesburg, IL 61401

-Norm Winick  
President

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**Renewal and Recollection**

Recently, Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Pheiffer renewed their membership in the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association. Accompanying their renewal was a letter from Mr. Pheiffer.

He recalled that the United States Marine Corps sent him to Western Michigan University, at Kalamazoo on March 1, 1944. A month or so thereafter, Carl Sandburg came to the campus and appeared at the student union. Mr. Pheiffer declared it was a memorable performance.

In later years Mr. Pheiffer was domiciled in Belvidere, Illinois, where he was a director of the Belvidere National Bank for more than twenty years. During that time he developed a close friendship with Dr. Richard Sandburg, the poet's nephew. Dr. Sandburg's practice was in Belvidere, although he lived in Rockford.

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**From the Superintendent**

On April 15th we will have the second Annual Garden Show at the Carl Sandburg Historic Site. The

hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. We are featuring heritage garden plants: flowers and vegetables that were standard in the gardens of our grandparents.

Garden-related exhibitors are invited to participate. Twelve-by-twelve canopy booths will be provided at no charge. Set-ups other than those provided must be approved by the Historic Site.

Exhibits are by pre-registration only, which must be done by March 15th. Please call me or Steve Holden at the Site for more information. Our telephone number is (309) 342-2361.

Heritage gardening is a relatively new idea developed as the outdoor farm museums created a demand for the older breeds. Home gardeners have adapted to the idea with plantings of prairie flowers and grasses in suburban yards.

Heritage vegetables are popular as well. Many of the old-time vegetables may be smaller, but they are hardier and have better flavor. The old-fashioned roses are more fragrant even if the blooms are not as exotic as today's hybrids. Most heritage plants are not as susceptible to disease as their more delicate descendants.

A new gardening industry has been created with professional plantmen breeding back to the plants of yesterday. and collecting old specimens from farm yards and road sides. The Internet is a good source for mail order catalogs for these plants. Below are listed a few that I found under "heritage plants":

Abundant Life Seed Foundation  
P.O. Box 772  
Port Townsend, WA 98368  
(open-pollinated seeds)

Country Lane Gardens, Ltd.  
4407 NE 41st Street

Seattle, WA 98105  
(old roses and perennials)

The Fragrant Path  
P.O. Box 328  
Ft. Calhoun, NE 68023

Heritage Flower Farm  
33725 Highway L  
Mukwonago, WI 53149

Underwood Gardens  
4N381 Maple Avenue  
Bensenville, IL 60106

Carl Sandburg began his own experience with gardening at an early age when he was about three years old. "We moved to another three-room one-story house, this on the north side of South Street, three doors west of Pearl Street. Here I wore dresses and watched my father spade a garden and plant and dig potatoes and carrots. I can never forget the feel of potatoes and carrots as my fingers brushed the black loam off them and I threw them into the baskets." (From *Always the Young Strangers*)

We look forward to seeing you at the Garden Show on April 15th.

-Carol Nelson

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### Wrinklings and Wild Things

*I was born almost ten thousand years ago,  
And there's nothing in the world  
that I don't know;  
I saw Peter, Paul and Moses.  
Playing ring-around-the-roses  
And I'm here to lick the guy what  
says 'taint so.*

(From *The American Songbag*, p. 331)

One evening Fog Wisp stopped for a talk with the Potato Face. Her eyes were sea-green with a little of hazel-nut mixed in. And her face had a pony look to it.

She told him she met four snooxes that day. And each snoox had a big windbag with a wind in it. The white snoox had the north wind, the black snoox had the south wind, the red snoox had the west wind, the green snoox had the east wind.

"I heard them talking," said the Fog Wisp, "about where to let the winds loose tomorrow. They decided to let a little west wind out mixed with a little south wind and this would make a southwest wind, a soft southwest wind for tomorrow. And the day after, they decided, they would let the north wind out, the whole bag, so the weather day after tomorrow will be cold and stormy and windy.

"I heard them go on talking and talking. If one of them needed more wind to go on talking he would untie the windbag, take a sniffer of wind, and then go on talking.

"I asked them if they never get tired being keepers of the wind. And they told me snooxes never get tired, never get hungry, never go to sleep, never wake up, never break anything, never fix anything, never buy or sell anything, never pay for anything because they never buy anything, never lose anything, never find anything never go away without coming back, never go up without coming down, never say anything without words, never sing without opening their mouths, never sign their names without pens or pencils, never bite except with their teeth, never count their toes and fingers to see if they have as many toes as fingers.

"I asked them if it is easy to be a snoox. And they said only a snoox knows what it is to be a snoox, and unless you are a snoox and understand snoox talk you don't know what snooxes are talking about. When two snooxes meet they ask only snoox questions and make snoox answers. That much they told me. And the way

they went on talking and sniffing the wind and talking more and more yet, I am sure I could never talk like a snoox without being a snoox.

"You are a sweet child, Fog Wisp," said the Potato Face, "and I always believe what you tell me even when you are wandering in your talk and trying to make me think you are spoofing."

And he went on talking and telling Fog Wisp, "A boy came past here this morning with pants having pants pockets bigger than the pants. I asked him why he had such big pockets and he said he kept on asking his father and mother to give him bigger and bigger pants pockets until now at last the pockets were bigger than the pants."

"Maybe he could talk snoox if he met a snoox," said Fog Wisp.

"He told me," went on the old man, "he was down on the Shampoo river yesterday. And the bridge was full of spiffs jumping headfirst off the bridges and diving headfirst into the deep mud till their heels were deep in it. They came up, scraped the mud off with scrapers, put the scrapers in their vest pockets, and hung the vests on a fence to dry. Then they put on fresh, clean vests and dived again. He said he counted six hundred and sixty-six (666) vests hanging on the fence and two thousand two hundred and twenty (2,222) birds flying back and forth making new homes for themselves in the vest pockets.

"He said he asked the spiffs if it is easy to be a spiff. And they told him only a spiff knows what it is to be a spiff and unless you are a spiff and understand spiff talk you don't know what spiffs are talking about. When two spiffs meet they ask only spiff questions and make spiff answers. He said the more he talked with them the more sure he was he could never talk like a spiff

without being a spiff himself.

"Just before going away he reached down into his long, deep pants pockets and brought out five or six vests and birds flew out of the vest pockets. And he talked a kind of talk to the birds so I have a suspicion he was a little spiff himself and can talk spiff talk with any spiff he meets."

Fog Wisp patted the old man's face with both hands and said, "I have to run away now. If we live long enough maybe both of us will know snoox talk and spiff talk."

"We know a little of it already," said the old man, "and we are both young with time to learn many kinds of talk."

And Fog Wisp walked away, a dreamy look in her sea-green eyes with a little of hazel-nut hazel mixed in. And her face had a pony look to it.

From **Potato Face**, a dozen stories published in 1930.

-Steve Holden

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### Galesburg When Carl Sandburg Was Born

Carl Sandburg was born on January 6, 1878, in Galesburg. One of the city's major employers 122 years ago was the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad Company. The locomotive department employed 499 men and the car department had 175.

An indication of the importance of the railroad employees in the community was a **Galesburg Daily Republican-Register** column of news items about their activities.

Here are a few examples:

The railroad postal clerks are donning their new uniforms--blue

from head to foot, relieved by gilt buttons.

Brakeman Herman Johnsch carries one finger "in a sling," the result of catching it between car bumpers, and bruising it badly.

C.B. & Q. train men are not all very handsome, but they can't help it poor fellows. So many of them have fingers off.

"Why don't you speak distinctly?" cried a passenger to a brakeman who announced the names of the stations in an unintelligible manner. "I can't understand a word you say." "You don't expect to have a fine, clear tenor at \$30 a month, do you?" replied the latter.

August Sandburg, Carl's father, was employed by the railroad as a blacksmith's helper. His chief tool was a sledgehammer, which he wielded ten hours each day. For his effort, he was paid the princely sum of about \$1.50 per day, or approximately \$35 per month.

If one keeps those amounts in mind, the following information from a Greene & Dore advertisement makes it clear August Sandburg's wages did not go very far by themselves.

The store was located at 18 East Main Street, and frequently promoted its wares in the **Republican-Register**. On January 8, 1878, it proclaimed it always kept in stock the best quality of goods.

More specifically, the emporium's proprietors offered:

10 1/2 lbs. A sugar for 1.00  
Prime roasted Rio coffee .25 per lb.  
Choice leaf lard, per lb. .12 1/2  
2 lbs. blackberries for 1.00  
Best New Orleans molasses, per gallon .70  
Silver Star Quincy Flour, per 100 lbs. 3.55

In addition to groceries, the store carried drugs and patent medicines. Among them was Hostetter's Bitters at 85 cents per bottle. It was one of the better brands, and even at that price it was a popular tonic, possibly because it contained the alcohol equivalent of a strong cocktail.

To feed his family, and to reduce his reliance on the grocery stores, August Sandburg planted and tended a large garden each year. The vegetables he harvested sustained his family through the winter months. To be sure, while the meals which resulted were nourishing, they seemed too reliant on carrots, potatoes and other root vegetables.

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#### Carl: North and South

(Editor's Note: Through the good offices of Dr. Richard Sandburg, *Inklings* and *Idlings* received this reminiscence from James Harvey Young. He is Candler Professor of American Social History Emeritus at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia.)

I learned about Carl Sandburg and his Galesburg connection in an English class when I moved to town in 1928 in the middle of the 8th grade. My teacher was proud of Carl and intent on acquainting her students with his poetry.

Soon Carl's nephew Richard became one of my best friends, an acquaintanceship that has survived for over seven decades. Through Dick I met Carl.

During my senior year at Knox, 1936-37, which was the college's centennial year, Carl came to the campus for several ceremonial occasions, including commencement in June. Before the graduates marched into the high school gym to get their diplomas, he mingled with us

offering his congratulations. At that time I had acquired second-hand copies of his *Rootabaga Stories* and *Rootabaga Pigeons*, the second a signed presentation.

By the fall of 1941, I had received my Ph.D. from the University of Illinois and had taken a position as an instructor in history at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. It was with great pleasure that I learned from the department chair, Ross McLean, that he also chaired the university lecture committee and that the first speaker for the year's program was to be Carl Sandburg.

On November 5, 1941, a month before Pearl Harbor, I wrote to my parents in Galesburg "On Monday night Carl Sandburg talked about the humor of Lincoln, and mixed with his analysis and examples some of his views on the current [international] situation which was most interventionist. I rode to the hotel with Dr. McLean to bring Sandburg to the lecture hall, had a chance for a nice visit for the 20 minute ride. Sandburg expressed interest in my thesis development, which Mr. [James Garfield] Randall had told him about." It was an account of the Civil War career of the Quaker abolitionist oratress, Anna Elizabeth Dickinson. "Sandburg praised Mr. Randall as the man who knows the most about Lincoln. He said [his nephew] Dick has been drafted into the army.

"After the lecture there was a reception at one of the fraternity houses with people milling around to meet the great man. His tone regarding Lincoln was most moderate, though it was obvious how much he appreciates Honest Abe. In American history class next day, I got quite a reaction, partly for my benefit, I'm sure, but interesting nevertheless. We had a chance to discuss a little the South vs. North attitudes."

In my letter I expressed my great pleasure in having had the opportunity to meet Carl Sandburg again and to have the intimate visit with him.

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### Carl Sandburg Writes an Epitaph

(In this issue's contribution from Dr. Richard Sandburg, he shares a poignant memory of his younger brother.)

Carl Sandburg's first name originally was Carl, but he subsequently decided to change it to Charles. Many years later, at the urging of his wife, he reverted to Carl.

Sandburg had a nephew, Charles, who was named after him and they were similar in several respects. Charles was a son of Carl's youngest sister, Martha. He became an orphan at the age of 14, his father having been killed a month before he was born.

Charles was a scholar with writing ability which, in time, may have equalled that of Carl. He majored in political science at the University of Illinois and became involved in an "America First" group, which was violently opposed to our being in World War II.

Upon completion of his studies and awaiting a call from the military, Charles obtained a menial job as a dish washer at Marshall Field's in Chicago.

When he received his draft summons, Charles indicated he wished to become a conscientious objector, as he was opposed to any form of violence.

As his brother, and already in the service, I implored Charles to sign up and request a position with the Adjutant General's office, which would be befitting of his college

training. He shrugged it off, and made a visit to his Uncle Carl's home in Harbert, Michigan.

Carl, being a veteran of the Spanish American War, attempted to dissuade Charles from requesting the role of a conscientious objector. He too felt the Adjutant General's position would be advisable, if possible. He gave Charles a check for \$100 for his college graduation.

Charles was irate and tore up the check. Eventually he requested to be allowed to serve with a combat group in a medical capacity.

He took his basic training at Camp Berkeley, Texas, and completed this a few days before I arrived there after a 14-month hitch in the South Pacific.

Charles wrote to me from Bath, England where he was assigned to the 36th Armored Infantry Regiment of the Third Armored Division (Spearhead Division) as a company aid man and litter bearer.

After the Allies had gained a foothold in France, the Third Armored Division stormed ashore and fought their way to help in the liberation of Paris.

Moving northward, Charles' regiment was involved in a fierce struggle in Coulonmiers, France. On August 27, 1944, while wearing a Red Cross armband, he was attempting to extricate and treat a mortally wounded major. He was machine-gunned in the back, and instantly killed.

Charles was buried in a military cemetery in Epinal, France. The Veteran's Administration offered to bring his body home for burial, but upon interrogating the family, I decided to permit him to remain with his buddies.

I received a letter from Charles' chaplain with a picture of his grave

and a white cross with his name inscribed. The graves are lined up neatly in monstrous rows. The greatest epitaph Charles has was not on his tombstone but in a letter which Carl Sandburg wrote to his sister, Mary Sandburg Johnson, Charles' aunt.

"It is sad news and yet it has its loveliness. That he found himself, that he made his fadeout in the smoke and flame of that particular hour and locale, that he knew his name for us would always have a deathless tinting if it happened as it came to happen--this is something."

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#### Martin Litvin

Martin Litvin died on January 29, 2000. He was an author who was born in Galesburg, and traveled far, but returned to Knox County because, as he said, "This is my life, my soil, my earth."

He wrote biographies, including one about Carl Sandburg's experiences at Lombard College. He also turned out several novels which were based on historical fact. One of his books, **The Journey**, received an award for excellence and scholarship in research.

Some critics suggested his books would have benefited from the services of an editor. There is some justice in that observation. His prose could be heavy. But because he did not want to relinquish the slightest degree of control over his words, he resisted efforts to modify them.

Perhaps his literary executor will permit a person of competence to undertake the editing task, with a view to new publication and greater dissemination. His works deserve the largest audience possible.

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Galesburg, Illinois 61401